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WHITE HOUSE: DEM REPS UNDERMINED NIC MISSION

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WASHINGTON — The Reagan administration believes Democrats on the House Intelligence Committee undermined U.S. efforts to pressure the government of Nicaragua by leaking sensitive details about the CIA's covert operation in Central America to the press.

Senior administration officials told The Post last night that they believe committee members leaked secret details of a briefing CIA Director William Casey gave them about the mine-laying operation in Nicaraguan harbors.

They believe the motivation behind the leaks was to score political points against President Reagan during an election year.

White House officials announced yesterday that the mining stopped earlier this week after the administration came under heavy fire from Congress and U.S. allies.

Officials are hoping that, by stopping the mining, Reagan can convince the House to approve a bill which would give \$21 million of emergency aid to CIA-backed guerrillas for other activities.

A senior White House official said yesterday that a CIA ship, registered in Panama, which is orchestrating the mining, left Nicaraguan waters two days ago.

Harbor mining secrets leaked

But the ship left after elite CIA-employed commandos from Argentina and Chile made another run in the Nicaraguan harbors to plant a series of acoustic mines.

"I wouldn't run a speedboat by there," the official said, implying there are still some mines in the water.

The Post reported in Monday's edition that the Administration was forced to back down after members of Congress became enraged that the mining operation was going on without formal notification from the CIA.

But, while the Administration has backed down, it remains furious with members of Congress who may have jeopardized the key element in its efforts to stop the spread of revolution in Central America.

White House officials noted yesterday that the existence of the mining operation was reported in the press as early as January.

But members of Congress did not make an

issue of it until last weekend.

It is no coincidence, say officials, that the criticism came after Casey briefed members of the House Intelligence Committee two weeks ago.

White House officials believe that someone on that committee leaked secret details of the operation to the press for political gain.

"There may have been some laws violated," said an official, adding that the FBI may be called to investigate the matter.

The House and Senate Intelligence Committees were formed in 1975 to oversee the operations of the U.S. intelligence agencies.

The CIA and other agencies were required to disclose all details of their operations to the committees, but committee members and staffers are sworn to secrecy about what is discussed.

The Senate on Tuesday night voted 84-12 to condemn the mining operation — a move which is non-binding.

The administration is expected to launch a lobbying campaign to

get passage for the \$21 million aid package for the rebels.

The Senate approved the aid before the mining furor erupted last week, but House Speaker Tip O'Neill has predicted that it will not pass the House.

O'Neill yesterday called the mining operation "terrorism at its worst."

And he added that Casey has done "very, very poorly as head of the CIA."

"He has taken liberties that no other member of the CIA has ever done before," the Speaker said.

Administration officials said that if Congress fails to approve the funding, the CIA may be forced to halt the entire anti-Sandinista operation as early as next week.

But other intelligence experts noted that the anti-Sandinista rebels, who have been operating out of bases in Honduras for two years, still may continue their campaign with aid from Latin American countries like Argentina.

Israel is also known to be assisting the rebels.

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